

# **We're Getting Results...**

***In making Health Care  
Affordable, Restoring the  
State Safety Net,  
Increasing Child Safety,  
Boosting Job Training,  
Reducing Hunger,  
Enhancing Senior and  
Mental Health Services  
and Providing  
Affordable Housing***

# **2004**

**Task Force on Compassion,  
Accountability, Reform, and  
Economic Security (CARES)**

**House  
Democratic  
Caucus**

## ***Results in Making Health Care More Affordable***



***In recent years, the Legislature has taken action to lower prescription drug costs, expand children's health coverage, pass the Patient's Bill of Rights, and add funding for local public health programs. With the state economy improving, lawmakers restored health and social services that had been cut to balance the state budget. The Compassion, Accountability, Reform, and Economic Security (CARES) Task Force advanced an agenda to elevate residents to better homes, better health and the chance for a better tomorrow.***

### **Medicaid Premiums**

House Democrats made children's health a top priority, helping to save health care for more kids and mitigate cutbacks made in order to balance the budget. The new budget eliminates children's Medicaid premiums for most low-income families and won't cost eligible families more than \$15 per child per doctor visit. But more must be done to ensure affordable health care for all children – a goal that is within reach by 2008.

### **Restoring Funding to Hospitals and Community Clinics**

Patching holes in the social safety net, the Legislature restored \$10 million to fund hospitals and clinics in both urban and rural parts of the state. Another \$2.5 million went to community health centers that serve all patients regardless of their ability to pay. In the past year, some clinics saw more than 20% increases in visits from uninsured patients.

### **Regional Support Networks**

The Legislature restored funding to Regional Support Networks (RSNs) that provide a range of community-based mental health services and inpatient care. The \$2.85 million allocation replaces dollars to help RSNs maintain services and oversight of patients who rely on the day-to-day services to help them to work and to live.

## **Results in Protecting Seniors and People with Disabilities**

*Seniors and people living with disabilities live with challenges that aren't faced by many other citizens. They usually have higher health care and treatment costs and many live on fixed incomes, struggling to make ends meet. The Legislature helped ease their burden this year with some practical reforms.*



### **Senior Property Tax Exemptions**

Protecting senior citizen homeowners, the Legislature lowered the property tax bills by hundreds of dollars for an estimated 40,000 eligible households.

### **Home Care Workers**

Allowing seniors and people with disabilities to receive care at home keeps client costs down and protects their dignity. In Washington, more than 20,000 individuals are clients of long-term care services in their own homes thanks to the 26,000 home care workers who provide critical services. The Legislature advanced a contract that respects those providing compassionate care, giving raises and health and worker's compensation benefits.

### **Civil Legal Services**

The Legislature struck a blow for justice and the rights of low-income seniors and others by stabilizing funding for legal services. The Constitutional right to equal justice had been threatened by the potential elimination of these funds.



### **Support for Disabled People Unable to Work**

House Democrats protected the last-resort lifeline for people with disabilities who are unable to work. Senate proposals would have made devastating cuts – \$15 million – from assistance for the unemployable, cutting off disabled people who had exhausted every last option.

### **Long-Term Care Facilities**

Besides providing more funding to home care workers, the Legislature also made significant improvements to the rates paid to residential long-term care providers. Nursing homes, adult family homes and assisted living facilities will get a 2.4 percent increase on July 1, 2004. These facilities also play a critical role in providing quality care for our state's seniors and disabled adults.

### **Job Support for People with Disabilities**

For someone living with a disability, finding a job is a challenge. Targeted funding pays for extended training as special-needs graduates move from school into the workforce. The partnership with employers works doubly well because they get incentives for hiring employees living with disabilities.

### **Area Agencies on Aging**

Lawmakers increased funding for local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) case management for seniors and people with disabilities by \$2.2 million. AAAs provide assistance at the local level to seniors who need to access resources, such as in-home care, medical insurance, long-term care, transportation, legal or other vital services.

## **Results to Protect Families and Children**



***In tight economic times, low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities can lose much more than discretionary income. Their everyday needs -- food, housing, and security -- are more at risk than ever before. Recognizing that many Washington residents need a hand up more than they need a hand out, lawmakers boosted support for hungry students, those in need of emergency shelter and women and children living in danger.***

### **Aid for Hungry Families**

The Legislature acted to reduce hunger here in Washington, one of the five hungriest states in the nation, according to the USDA. Food stamp eligibility was increased and paperwork was simplified while school lunch programs were expanded to help provide proper nutrition to hundreds of students in low-income families who are clamoring for academic achievement.

### **Help with Housing Costs**

The Legislature approved state funds to match private dollars raised to provide homeless families with housing services. Lawmakers also added to the Housing Trust Fund that gives a leg up to low-income families and people living with disabilities.

### **Domestic Violence Protections**

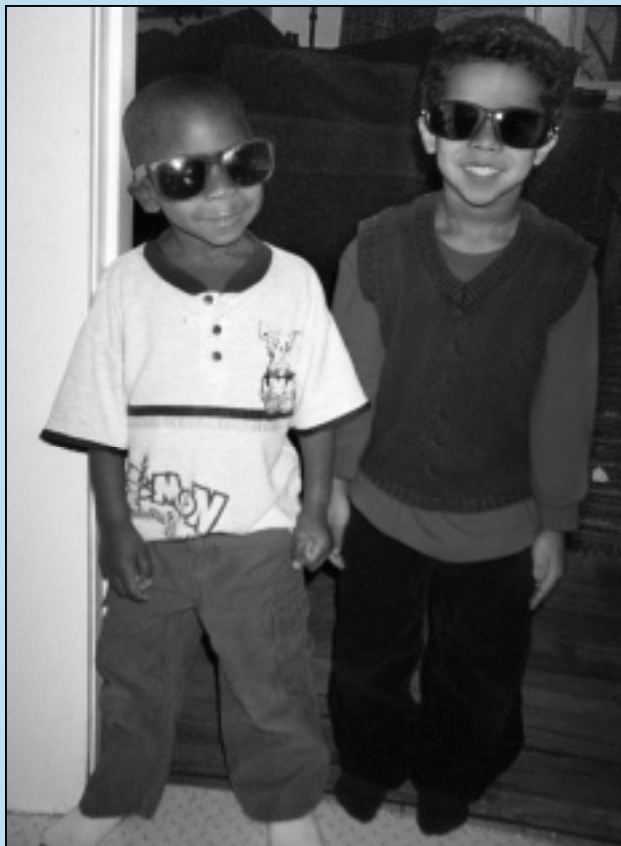
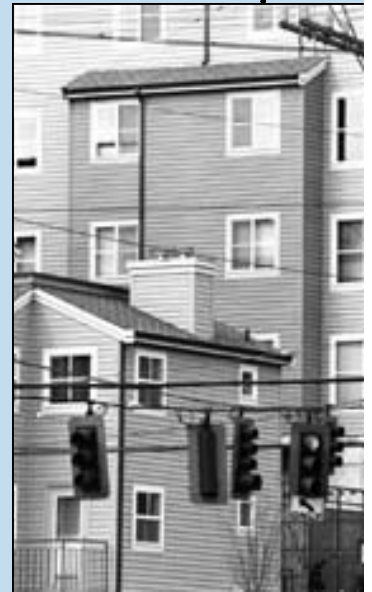
Protecting people from danger is a moral obligation for all of us, and the Legislature this year came to the aid of potential victims of domestic violence. Reforms help keep women and children out of danger and reduce victims' expenses if they need to move to safety. Other measures passed increase fines on domestic-violence offenders and provide more safe housing for those in danger.

### **Helping Kids in Foster Care**

Foster kids need stability. The Legislature approved \$500,000 to keep kids in foster care with grandparents or relatives and to avoid changing schools.

### **Assistance for Refugees and Immigrants**

Skills training and job placement assistance are available to refugees and immigrants via Limited English Proficiency (LEP) pathways programs. The final budget targets \$1.25 million for LEP, giving thousands of residents help each month. Some programs help boost client employment rates and income levels while others provide referrals for medical assistance, housing assistance and teaching basic life skills.



## ***Some unfinished business...***

*The House passed other measures to support people suffering from mental health disorders, seniors struggling to pay prescription drug bills and overworked hospital doctors who provide emergency care and obstetric care. Unfortunately, the Senate did not support those measures.*

### **Mental Health Parity**

The House passed a popular plan to have insurance companies cover mental health services at the same levels for medical or surgical services. More than 30 states have already passed some form of mental health parity laws, recognizing that one in five Americans will experience anxiety or depression at some point. These and other mental illnesses are preventable and treatable with affordable coverage that would reduce suicide rates and social service costs, including jail and treatment center expenditures.

### **Affordable Medicines from Canada**

Prescription drugs are one of the most pressing and unmanageable costs for seniors. U.S. residents are paying up to 80% more for the same drugs as Canadian residents. House members created a plan to help residents save money by allowing them to buy drugs from Canada.

### **Funding for Hospitals and Clinics**

Senators turned their backs on \$30 million in additional reimbursements for doctors who deliver babies and provide emergency care for lower-income patients. The relief for emergency rooms and doctors who deliver babies was stalled despite House plans to set aside matching funds for reimbursements to hospitals and doctors.



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***House Democratic Caucus***